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# Our Good and Faithful Servants

**THE MAN WHO KEPT THE SECRETS: Richard Helms and the CIA.** By Thomas Powers. Knopf. 393 pp. \$12.95

By RICHARD HARWOOD

**I**N THE PROCESS OF SHEDDING illusions over the past decade or so, we Americans have fallen into an unattractive habit of scapegoating.

I quote from a recent book review by John Kenneth Galbraith:

"In the space of a few months in 1959 and 1960, [Allen] Dulles, as head of the CIA, showed himself to be a master of disastrous ineptitude. In those months he sent Gary Powers over the Paris Summit, helped overthrow the neutralist government of Souvanna Phouma in Laos . . . and was the man in charge of the organization that was responsible for perhaps the greatest foul-up in our history, the Bay of Pigs."

Dulles did it. Or J. Edgar Hoover. Or some other wretch who must suffer for our sins. It is the devil theory of history or, as someone has said of the CIA, the notion that rogue elephants unaccountably appear in our happy land to bring shame to us all. It is hard for us to accept the possibility that such men and institutions have, in fact, been our good and faithful servants and that we have been their witting sponsors.

This impressive book by Thomas Powers addresses that possibility. It persuades me, beyond reasonable doubt, that the Central Intelligence Agency, by and large, has been a most careful servant of the American government and, by extension, the servant of us all.

In 1948, as the agency was being put together, its covert action unit was given a charter by the National Security Council. It authorized "propaganda, economic warfare, preventive direct action, including sabotage, anti-sabotage, demolition and evacuation measures; subversion against hostile states, including assistance to underground resistance groups, and support of indigenous anti-Communist elements

in threatened countries of the free world." There was another stipulation: These activities should be carried out in such a way "that any U.S. government responsibility for them is not evident to unauthorized persons and that if uncovered the U.S. government can plausibly disclaim any responsibility for them."

This was a charter for dirty tricks. I suspect that, if it had been put to a national referendum at the time, it would have met with the overwhelming approval of the American people.

It is clear, in any event, what Harry Truman and his Security Council expected of the agency, and it is clear from the evidence Powers assembles that those expectations were shared by every subsequent president of the United States. The covert interventions in Iran, Guatemala, the Congo, Chile, Cuba, Laos and elsewhere were not impulsive cowboy operations by mad agents. They were the deliberate policies of the American government.

When it comes to the assassination plots against foreign leaders, such as Lumumba and Castro, the question is a bit stickier. The Church Committee investigated those matters four years ago and came in with a verdict of case not proved. But the circumstantial evidence Powers assembles persuades me that the CIA was not acting on its own.

As Powers writes, "talk about killing was commonplace" in Washington in the 1950s and 1960s. A West German general came to Allen Dulles, Richard Helms and others in 1952 with a proposal (which was rejected) for the assassination of Walter Ulbricht, the East German leader. At a State Department meeting in the mid-'50s, the subject was Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt, of whom Dulles said: "If that colonel of yours pushes us too far, we will break him in half." In November 1960, Undersecretary of State Livingston Merchant asked his colleagues of the Special Group overseeing covert operations if "any real planning had been done for taking direct positive action against Fidel Raul and Che Guevara." Their demise, he suggested, would leave Cuba "leaderless and probably brainless." Later in that decade, Robert Murphy of the president's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, asked why the CIA hadn't killed Ho Chi Minh as a solution in Vietnam: "Ho is the problem, isn't he? Can't you fellows do something to get rid of him?"

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